

Message Text

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72

ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7401

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

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SUBJ: CHURCH CONFRONTS PRESIDENT LOPEZ OVER PROPOSED NEW
GOVERNOR

1. ON FEB 28, 75, PRESIDENT LOPEZ NAMED 8 NEW GOVERNORS IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF BOYACA, CAUCA, CESAR, CORDOBA, HUILA, NARINO, RISARALDA, AND SUCRE. THE PRESIDENT IS EXPECTED TO NAME A NEW GOVERNOR IN QUINDIO IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN PARITY BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS IN APPOINTIVE POSITIONS. A LIST OF NEW GOVERNORS IS BEING FORWARDED SEPARATELY.

2. THE NAMING OF THE NEW GOVERNORS WAS DESIGNED TO END AN ALLEGED "CRISIS" AT THE DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL. SEVERAL EMBASSY SOURCES BELIEVE THAT THE "CRISIS" MAY HAVE BEEN GIVEN MORE ATTENTION THAN DESERVED BY LOPEZ AND PARTICULARLY THE LIBERAL PRESS IN ORDER TO DIVERT PUBLIC ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE REAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE GOC AND THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC--INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT, THE LATTER TWO PARTICULARLY CHRONIC COLOMBIAN DISEASES. IN ADDITION, BY NAMING NEW GOVERNORS IN DEPARTMENTS WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES INVOLVING LIBERAL

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CONGRESSMEN, LOPEZ MAY HAVE HOPED TO AVERT A REBELLION IN LIBERAL

RANKS IN THE CONGRESS OVER THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW COMPTROLLER GENERAL. LOPEZ HAS PROMISED THIS POSITION TO A CONSERVATIVE BUT MANY LIBERALS WANT TO APPOINT A LIBERAL (SEPTEL TO FOLLOW).

3. LOPEZ PROBABLY CREATED A GREATER DIVERSION THAN INTENDED BY NAMING A TWICE-MARRIED WOMAN AS THE NEW GOVERNOR OF RISARALDA. THE BISHOP AND ASSISTANT BISHOP OF RISARALDA PUBLICLY CALLED FOR LOPEZ TO WITHDRAW HIS APPOINTMENT OF DORA LUZ CAMPO DE BOTERO "NOT FOR RELIGIOUS BUT FOR MORAL REASONS", PRESUMABLY BECAUSE SHE MARRIED HER FIRST HUSBAND IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, HAD A CHURCH SEPARATION AFTER SEVERAL YEARS AND TWO CHILDREN, AND THEN REMARRIED ABROAD IN A CIVIL CEREMONY. DEFENDERS AND CRITICS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN COLOMBIA, AND OTHERS, QUICKLY JOINED THE DEBATE, THUS INFLATING THE ISSUE BEYOND ITS INTRINSIC IMPORTANCE.

4. ON MARCH 4 PRESIDENT LOPEZ, IN A DETAILED DEFENSE OF CIVIL MARRIAGES AND HIS APPOINTMENT OF MRS. BOTERO, NEVERTHELESS ADVISED THE BISHOP THAT HE WOULD GLADLY APPOINT ANOTHER PERSON TO THE GOVERNORSHIP IF MRS. BOTERO DECIDED NOT TO ACCEPT THE POSITION. AFTER MEETING WITH LOPEZ MARCH 4, MRS BOTERO APPARENTLY STEPPED ASIDE, ALTHOUGH OFFICIAL WORD WILL NOT BE ISSUED UNTIL LATER. MEANWHILE, THE ASSISTANT BISHOP OF RISARALDA SOFTENED THE VETO OF MRS BOTERO BY LUMPING HER APPOINTMENT TOGETHER WITH OTHER ALLEGED NATIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT WHICH THE CHURCH HAD REMAINED SILENT, INCLUDING THE APPOINTMENT OF A MARXIST AS PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, AND THE PROPOSALS IN THE CONGRESS TO LEGALIZE ABOFTION AND DIVORCE, ALL OF WHICH HE SEEMED TO IMPLY REPRESENTED A DETERIORATION OF COLOMBIAN MORALITY.

5. COMMENT: EMBASSY SOURCES CLAIM THAT THE BASIS FOR THE CHURCH VETO OF MRS BOTERO WAS NOT HER CIVIL MARRIAGE BUT RATHER HER UNFAVORABLE PERSONAL REPUTATION IN PEREIRA (THE CAPITAL OF RISARALDA). WHATEVER THE REASONS FOR THE CHURCH-STATE CONFRONTATION, THE WITHDRAWAL OF MRS. BOTERO'S CANDIDACY FOR GOVERNOR WILL NOT END THE DEBATE. PROPONENTS AND OPPONENTS OF CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE MAY BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE PUBLIC DEBATE AT LEAST SEVERAL MORE DAYS.

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